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Texas Indigent Defense Commission Approves Over \$1.7 Million to Improve Indigent Defense with Focus on Mental Health and Rural Communities

AUSTIN, TX — At its August 28th Board Meeting, the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC) approved over \$1.7 million in new Improvement Grants to enhance indigent defense services across the state, with a focus on expanding access to specialized mental health defense services and strengthening public defender capacity in rural Texas.

The Commission approved key grant awards, including:

- **\$200,200 to Atascosa County** to staff its new Mental Health Court with an attorney and social worker to serve clients with mental illness facing non-violent felony charges.
- **\$410,083 to Hays County** to add a dedicated mental health team to the Hays County Public Defender's Office, providing specialized representation and connecting clients to community resources.
- **\$362,549 to Medina County** to expand capacity of the Hill Country Regional Public Defender's Office by hiring a social worker and four case managers focused on clients with mental illness.
- **\$760,607 to Polk County** to establish a new public defender's office with four attorneys and two staff members, expected to manage about half of the county's indigent defense caseload.

"These grants are an important step in strengthening public defense across Texas, particularly in rural areas and for clients with mental health needs," said Scott Ehlers, Executive Director of TIDC. "We are grateful to our community partners who are leading these efforts."

TIDC also issued its first round of funding under its grants for One-Time or Temporary Assistance for Existing Rural Public Defense Programs. The Legislature made \$10 million available for these grants. Eligible uses include, but are not limited to, indigent defense internships and fellowships, recruiting support, training, equipment, and reducing county matching fund requirements. Under this program, the TIDC Board awarded a total of \$3,499,181 to Atascosa, Bee, Burnet, Culberson, Hale, Maverick, Medina, Potter, Tom Green, and Victoria Counties, as well as the Caprock Regional Public Defender Office at Texas Tech University School of Law.

About TIDC

The Texas Indigent Defense Commission funds, oversees, and improves indigent defense in each of the State's 254 counties. TIDC is led by 13 commission members and 19 staff. To learn more, visit www.tidc.texas.gov.

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